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PROGRAM The Today Show

STATION WRC TV  
NBC Network

DATE January 19, 1977 7:00 AM CITY Washington, D. C.

SUBJECT An Interview with William Colby *ABOUT SORENSSEN NOMINATION*

TOM BROKAW: The big political story in Washington this week has been the withdrawal of Ted Sorensen as the nominee of Jimmy Carter to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. And there's a fair amount of confusion about the story. You may recall that on Monday of this week, Vice President-elect Mondale and Hamilton Jordan, two men who are close to Jimmy Carter, were on the "Today" program, saying that they expected Carter to fully back Mr. Sorensen. Less than an hour later, Mr. Sorensen voluntarily withdrew his own name. The question, of course, was: how soon did Mr. Carter know that Mr. Sorensen was going to pull himself out of contention.

Well, last night a source close to the President-elect told NBC News that Mr. Carter knew on Saturday of this past week. And as for Sorensen's reaction to all of it, well, one of his close friends questioned him about how Mr. Carter had supported him. Sorensen reportedly said he didn't put a noose around my neck, but he kicked the chair out from beneath me. So that's a story that will be banging around Washington for the next ten days or so, as President-elect Jimmy Carter now tries to decide on a new nominee to head the Central Intelligence Agency.

With us this morning is a man who got a great deal of attention when he was the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William Colby, who has since left the agency, has now resumed the practice of law here in Washington, D. C.

Mr. Colby, do you think the criticism of Ted Sorensen was justifiable made by some of the senators for the publication of classified material?

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WILLIAM COLBY: Well, I think that Mr. Sorensen's views about the fact that we need less of our intelligence material classified are appropriate. I think that's true myself. I've always believed that. Some people say maybe that's why I got fired too. But nonetheless, I think that our intelligence has to serve the constitutional process, and that means that it has to be made available to our Congress and to our people so that they can make good decisions about foreign policy.

Nonetheless, I think we do have some secrets that we need to protect. And I think drawing the line between what should be made public and what should remain secret is going to require a continuing effort. I think that the way to answer this is to go through a hearing and look into it carefully, get the comments of the individual involved and then make a judgment as to whether they're appropriate. I thought Mr. Sorensen's defense was quite eloquent on this.

TOM PETTIT: Mr. Colby, Mr. Sorensen said that the intelligence community did not seem quite ready to accept him. What did you do to prevent his nomination going through?

COLBY: I did nothing. Somebody called me and asked me to participate in an effort to block his nomination, and I refused to do so.

PETTIT: Who called you, sir?

COLBY: I really would rather not say.

PETTIT: A person in the agency today?

COLBY: No. No. A person outside the agency entirely.

PETTIT: In the Senate?

COLBY: Political figure.

PETTIT: In the Senate?

COLBY: And I just decided that I wasn't going to participate in that kind of an effort.

BROKAW: On what grounds did they want you to oppose his nomination?

COLBY: They didn't really go into it in any depth. I had seen some of the published material about his being a conscientious objector and things of that nature. But I think that the problem really is that the President ought to be able to nominate his own man. But the Senate committee ought to look very carefully into his qualifications. My own confirmation

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hearings took a number of days. I was called just about every name in the book by a lot of people. And I answered those questions, and eventually enough of the Senate voted for me to approve me.

PETTIT: Did you think Mr. Sorensen was qualified to head the CIA?

COLBY: I think he had a number of qualifications that were quite impressive. I think his experience in the White House as a user of intelligence, his ability to put words together and get conclusions I think is one of the most challenging problems of intelligence.

PETTIT: In short, you would have approved his going into that office.

COLBY: Yes, certainly.

PETTIT: There is a bit of a controversy going on about intelligence estimates concerning the Russian military build-up, or so-called build-up. How much of a problem is there in coordinating the CIA and the Pentagon?

COLBY: Well, there's not a problem. There're obviously different views. I mean some of these issues don't have any answers, and there're a lot of different opinions. I think intelligence, the process, is one of gathering together all those different views and trying to search the best answer. We made a particular effort to include differing, dissenting opinions in intelligence estimates. And as I understand the process this year, they called in an outside group to criticize the results of the professional assessment.

BROKAW: But that was done clearly for political reasons, don't you think?

COLBY: No, I don't think so. I think that this was a process that we had discussed sometime ago, making sure that these important estimates get an adversary process, that they be attacked and the people have to defend why they come to these opinions.

BROKAW: Can you make a judgment about the critical question involved in those analysis, whether the Soviet Union is attempting to achieve military superiority?

COLBY: I think that's a little bit of a false issue, quite frankly. I think the question isn't what the intention of the people in the Kremlin this moment is. I think the question is where are we headed in the future, what is the likely shape of the world in the next ten years.

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Clearly the Soviet Union's a superpower. Clearly they've built up not only their nuclear strength, but particularly their conventional strength. I think that they have the intention of certainly protecting themselves against invasion, as they were subjected to, and continuing to build their strength. And if their predictions that the West is going to fall apart come true, then they will inherit the world. They have that belief as part of their religion, you might say.

PETTIT: Mr. Colby, based on your own experience at the CIA, can you tell us that the Russian military build-up began in 1973, as both intelligence agencies, the Pentagon and the CIA, are telling us now?

COLBY: No, I don't think it began in 1973. It began long before that. Obviously after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 they were resolved to increase their nuclear strength where they had been shown to be totally inferior. And they have built up to parity in nuclear strength. They have also, however, modernized their army, extended their navy so that it now sails all the seas of the world, as distinct from being a small coastal defense force.

BROKAW: Very briefly, Mr. Colby, Mr. Carter is now making a decision about who he nominates next. You came up through the ranks, so to speak, in the intelligence community. Do you know think, in reflection, that it's important to have an outsider head the agency at this time?

COLBY: Even when I was in there in that job, I said that I believed that it's probably best that the intelligence community have an outside chief. I think that enables him to operate. One of our best directors was John McCone, who was an outsider. And I think he was independent of the activities of the agency, could make decisions and use it to serve the country in the best way.

BROKAW: William Colby, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.